

-Hall Urges President to Develop Comprehensive Strategy for Influx of New Veterans -

Washington, DC – In the wake of President Obama's new Afghanistan strategy that includes an increase of 30,000 troops, U.S. Rep. John Hall (D-Dover) is leading House Committee on Veterans' Affairs members to urge the President to include a comprehensive strategy to support veterans returning home from war.

"As we eventually remove our forces from service in Iraq and Afghanistan, an untold number of servicemen and women will come to us for help," Hall wrote in a letter to Obama. "While the mission at hand is crucial, we must prepare to care for those who will enact the new strategy on the ground and put their lives on the line for our country."

Since being sworn into Congress in January 2007, Congressman Hall, who serves as Chairman of the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs, has been working to remove the burdensome roadblocks veterans often face when trying to claim the disability benefits from the Veterans' Administration (VA) that they have earned with their service. Hall has written legislation, The COMBAT Act (H.R. 952), which would expand the definition of "combat with the enemy" to include active service in a theater of combat. This would eliminate the need for veterans to prove their service-connected PTSD with service records or medals. Recently, Congress passed into law advanced appropriations for the VA so that the Department of Veterans Affairs can better plan for the needs of veterans. The House has also worked this year to help homeless veterans, women veterans and to make the claims process less confusing and cumbersome.

"All too often veterans return from war only to be forced to fight a battle with the VA to access the benefits they have earned," stated Hall. "I fear that unless we develop a comprehensive strategy for the hundreds of thousands of veterans returning home from current conflicts, that the problems at the VA will worsen. Veterans deserve a VA that serves as their advocate, not their adversary."

The full text of the letter Hall and his colleagues who serve on the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs sent to President Obama follows. The letter was also signed by U.S. Representatives Tim Walz, Michael Michaud, Tom Perriello, Ann Kirkpatrick, and Harry Mitchell.

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The Honorable Barack H. Obama
President of the United States of America
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20500

Mr. President,

We know the decision to increase the number of troops deployed to Afghanistan was not an easy one. Regardless of one's position on the conflict, your recent speech underscored the fact that this new strategy will expose even more of our men and women in uniform to harm. As the elected representatives of the men and women in uniform, we are greatly concerned about what an increased mission in Afghanistan will mean for those who return suffering from illnesses

such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI).

The last 8 years of conflict have demonstrated that the invisible wounds of war often remain untreated and unnoticed, causing our veterans untold physical, personal and professional harm. Many are subjected to a long and arduous claims process in order to receive the benefits they have earned through service to our country. The additional 30,000 men and women to be deployed to Afghanistan only reinforce the fact that as more soldiers become veterans, we must remove the roadblocks to treatment.

This Congress has worked tirelessly to improve the care for our troops once they return home. For the first time the Department of Veterans Affairs has advanced appropriations authority so that they can better plan for the needs of veterans. The COMBAT Act, H.R. 952, would expand the definition of "combat with the enemy" to include active service in a theater of combat. This would eliminate the need for veterans to prove their service-connected PTSD with service records or medals. The House has also worked this year to help homeless veterans, women veterans and to make the claims process less confusing and cumbersome. We look forward to working with you and your Administration to develop a comprehensive strategy to deal with the coming influx of new veterans.

Over 2,000,000 men and women have already served in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. As of June, more than 350,000 veterans have been compensated for PTSD. As we eventually remove our forces from service in Iraq and Afghanistan, an untold number of servicemen and women will come to us for help. While the mission at hand is crucial, we must prepare to care for those who will enact the new strategy on the ground and put their lives on the line for our country.

Thank you for your attention to this letter, and your continued commitment to the men and women in uniform.

Sincerely,

John Hall
Member of Congress